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ABSTRACT

A reading program designed for adults in business, industry, or self-directing professions must focus on specific reading skills which are different from other adult reading programs. Professionals generally have good-to-excellent reading skills which they developed in school and college and are thus primarily concerned with developing (1) efficient and fast reading, (2) the ability to deal with professional jargon and technical vocabulary, (3) the ability to deal with specialized reading materials in their fields, and (4) facility for creativeness of expression. Because professionals have learned meticulous and careful reading skills in school, they often need to learn skills of general comprehension of large quantities of material. The materials used should be those the professionals come in contact with--either brought in by the students or found by the teacher. Some guidelines for working with professionals are (1) make the program visably individualized, (2) review basic reading skills, (3) teach general as well as technical vocabulary skills, (4) teach flexible rather than fast reading, (5) explain the theory behind the techniques taught, and (6) be egalitarian and uncondescending toward the class. References are included. (AL)

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Abstract

THE PROFESSIONALLY-ORIENTED READER

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Describes an instructional program in reading for the professional-level adult in terms of five criteria: who he is, what his goals are, what particular needs he has in reading, what particular reading materials he works with, and how teaching methodology must be adapted to him. A set of operational and methodological guidelines for dealing with this type of reader is included.

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THE PROFESSIONALLY-ORIENTED READER

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(A paper presented to the 1971 annual meeting of the National Reading Conference December 4, 1971, in Tampa, Florida, as part of a symposium "Differentiated Reading Programs for Five Types of Adult Learners")

In describing a particular type of instructional program in reading deemed appropriate for any given group of learners, at least five points appear to me to be essential: (a) a clear statement of exactly what group one is concerned with, along with some set of criterial characteristics defining that group; (b) a clear elucidation of the particular goals with which members of that group typically approach the instructional program; (c) an enumeration of the particular reading skills membership in that group demands or calls for; (d) a recognition of the particular types of

reading materials usually encountered by members of that group; and finally, from the teacher's point of view, (e) a consideration of how various aspects of instructional methodology--evaluation, presentation, etc.--will probably differ when directed to that particular group rather than to another. These questions, then, will form the pattern of this paper:

1. Who is the professionally-oriented reader?
2. What does he want and expect from a reading class?
3. What reading skills does he need?
4. What types of reading materials does he regularly make use of? and
5. How does a teacher treat him differently from how he'd treat another type of reader?

Defining the Group

Of all the categories of learners dealt with in this symposium--the vocationally-oriented reader, the college-student reader, etc.--this category is probably the broadest and the most in need of definition, since in America the adjective "professional" has over the years come to be used by practically every identifiable occupational group. Thus, we have "professional" cab-drivers, "professional" barbers, "professional" waiters and waitresses, and even "professional" garbage-collectors. Clearly for our purposes, those of describing a certain population in terms of its reading needs and then differentiating those needs from the needs of other groups, a finer, though perhaps less democratic, delineation is needed. For today, then, I would propose the following criteria: In terms of our purposes, a "professionally-oriented" reader is

(a) a college or university graduate;

(b) a relatively self-directing practitioner of a traditionally "accepted" profession, or

(c) operating in business or industry at an essentially managerial or supervisory level;

(d) already relatively successful at meeting at least the basic communicative needs of his occupation, and

(e) free from any needs for true "remediation" in reading, at least in terms of age-normative standards.

These last two points, of course, are the crucial ones; the professionally-oriented reader is ordinarily not a poor reader (and often even a relatively good one) but rather one who needs, because of the particular demands of his work, to be an even better one. This is not to say that we don't occasionally find an exception to these rules; some individuals do at times rise vocationally to the point of meeting the first three criteria but not the final two. My point is simply that when these exceptions do turn up in our classes, we must treat them differently from the ways suggested in this paper.

Defining the Group's Goals

The most fundamental expressed need of this group is almost always the same; time is what they feel most short of, and speed-reading is what they're after, at least at first query. It's been said that the modern business and professional world runs on paper, and in many ways this statement is essentially true. Business communication, the sharing of professional expertise, and simply the routine demands of "keeping up" professionally today, have created an information explosion, and the fall-out of this explosion almost always reaches the desk of the busy professional or executive via the medium of hard, cold print. Almost invariably, then, this is the first felt goal of the professionally-oriented reader: how to meet the reading needs of his daily work faster, more efficiently, and with as little waste motion as possible (Dulin and Otto, 1970).

For most professionals, however, speed is not their only goal. In addition to being members of their particular occupational groups, they're also citizens, consumers, and contributing participants in the civic and cultural

affairs of their communities. Thus, their needs at these points overlap those of all other adult readers: a broadened range of general reading skills; a deeper, more expressive vocabulary; and a multitude of the same locational, organizational, and retentional skills needed by all other self-managing members of a twentieth-century democracy.

In sum, then, their goals are always at least dual; (a) high general literacy plus a facility for creativeness of expression, (b) sound general comprehension skills plus increased efficiency of rate, (c) a broad general vocabulary plus an ability to deal effectively with the specialized technical jargons of their professions, and (d) the specialized reading skills needed by all adult readers plus an ability to deal effectively with the specialized reading materials used within their particular fields.

Defining the Group's Needs

Probably the best way to proceed at this point is to treat the professional reader's needs in two stages: first, as a member of the "managerial" class of society generally; and second, as a practitioner with particular workaday problems involving reading.

As a Member of Society. Professionals almost by definition are the social and civic leaders of their communities. Most local governmental bodies, most organizations for civic betterment, and most community organizations for cultural, educational, and social progress draw their support primarily from the ranks of professionals; so a whole body of reading skills are needed here. To be a good Jaycee, an effective school-board member, or simply an active involved citizen, the professional reader must (a) be able to read rapidly enough and well enough to keep up with current scientific and technological advances, (b) be able to use the community's informational resources to find the answers to pragmatic civic and social problems, and (c) be able to separate

fact from opinion in the reading matter he utilizes in deciding what public policies to support or oppose. But beyond all this still lies the professional's specialized workaday life.

As a Working Professional. Here, it seems to me, is where we can do the very most for the busy professional in terms of helping him meet the reading problems he faces daily. The typical professional, since he's usually been highly trained in a particular academic or technical specialty, has generally passed through an intensive apprenticeship in the accumulation and mastery of much finely-detailed and highly-specific factual information, practically "data." To do this, during his student years, he's often had to adopt a reading style far too slow, far too painstaking, and far too meticulous for the busy pace of his present life. Now, rather than memorizing facts and figures for specific recall, he must make ongoing judgments based on a "big picture" approach. The physician, for example, instead of memorizing the names of muscles, nerves, and bones as he did when preparing for his examinations back in medical school, must now simply "keep up" on the new ideas he encounters in his journals. Where before he had to "know" all the details, since he was going to be tested on them, he can now "look back" when the need arises. His task now, then, is the general comprehension of a great deal of material, rather than the specific mastery of a lesser amount.

Luckily, this task is facilitated, once the reader knows how to go about it, by the standard formats of most technical materials. Journal articles, contracts, lists of building specifications, and legal documents almost always have a regular "pattern," and the reader who makes use of these patterns can handle the overall materials much more rapidly and efficiently than one who tries to read them in his old, regular, "student" way of reading. And this point, of course, leads us to our next topic: the materials the professional reader uses.

Reading Materials Used by the Group

In terms of the professional reader's first identity, his membership in the leadership class of his community, the materials he needs to be taught to use are pretty much the same across all the professions: books, serious magazines, local and regional and national newspapers. To keep up with this sort of reading, he needs to (a) have a good, solid, relatively-high base reading rate (probably 500 to 600 words per minute or more), (b) know how to survey, skim, and otherwise deal rapidly with print in a selective, efficient way, and (c) know how and when to re-read carefully, how and when to make use of inference, and how and when to locate additional information when necessary.

In terms of his second identity, that of the specialist practitioner, the materials he needs to deal with are very specific to his field: journals, professional magazines and newsletters, and highly specialized reference materials.

For the instructor dealing with groups of professional readers, the best way to proceed in this area is the direct one: to have his students bring to class samples of all the reading materials they deal with in their work. In some instances, having each student keep a daily "log" or "diary" of his reading activities is a good system; for others, simply discussing the problems in class and then soliciting sample materials is enough. If the teacher knows in advance exactly what specific groups of professionals are to be in his classes (as is often the case when special classes are set up through professional organizations or university extension centers) a good deal of anticipating can be done in advance. Those planning the programs can interview members of each particular group ahead of time and arrange to have work-relevant materials on hand when the students arrive. This, of course, is a definite advantage to the instructor, since he can then examine these materials

in advance, rather than having to "perform on the spot" as the students hand him the sample materials they've brought to class for the evening. Either way, it's important that this aspect of class-organization be truly "tailor-made" for the group. To facilitate transfer of training in any learning situation, it's important that the practice situation is as much as possible like the later application situation; and in teaching adults, where we're changing old behaviors (a much more demanding teaching task, actually, than the forming of new ones where none existed before) this is particularly crucial. For a good session-by-session description of how this can be done, Ken Ahrendt's course outline in Reading Improvement (1971) is a fine guide.

Adaptations in Methodology for the Group.

This final point, the degree to which we go about teaching the professionally-oriented reader differently than we would others, is one on which many differences of opinions exist. Some teachers, in fact, would claim that they do things little differently when teaching professionals. "I individualize for all my students!" they would say.

Most teachers I've discussed this with, however, do mention special points of procedure and particular points of teaching emphasis. Summarized, they make up the following ten guidelines:

1. As noted above, use teaching-learning materials as professionally and personally relevant as possible. Not only will this facilitate better transfer of training, but the "face validity" of such materials to the student will also be very motivating.

2. In other words, let your individualization show; the more visibly adaptive your program is, the better. Since professionals are specialists themselves, they expect, more than other groups, to get highly individualized treatment when they, themselves, are the clients and consumers.

3. At the same time, don't let the personal nature of this content pull you off the track. High-interest material, particularly when it comes from the group's own field of specialization, can sometimes act as too ready a springboard for individual students' ego-trips into their own experiences, triumphs, and personal biases. Keep in mind that reading the material at hand, rather than refuting its arguments or demonstrating personal expertise regarding it, must remain the major focus of the group's instructional activities.

4. Despite what we've said in our general criteria above, don't be too assumptive about basic skills. When in doubt at all about the group's (or a particular member's) ability to deal with a basic skill, do review it. It's better to reinforce an old skill briefly than to inadvertently omit it through being afraid of condescending to the group.

5. So, teach general vocabulary as well as specialized. Because of the narrowness of much professional training, even highly-educated specialists sometimes have significant gaps in their basic vocabularies. Don't, however, dwell too long on this if it appears to be unnecessary for a particular group.

6. Use rate as a bait, but move as quickly as possible to the concept of flexible reading rather than simply fast reading. As noted above, speed-reading is what often draws the professional to a reading class, but mere drill on base-rate is not enough. Rate of comprehension, not rate and comprehension must be our approach; don't let an overly-eager class completely separate the two.

7. Be egalitarian in your relationships with individual students (Smith and Dulin, 1971). Not only must you not let yourself be condescending, since treating professional-level adults like children is the fastest way there is to drive them away, but also don't let the group's outside-of-class professional pecking-orders move into class relationships. Student A may be

B's boss all day down at the office, but in class he must operate as a peer and an equal, particularly during recitation and discussion sessions.

8. In this vein--your own relationships with members of the class--watch out for blind followers. Many highly-specialized professionals (medical men and specialists in the "hard" sciences, in particular) are used to situations in which there's always one, single, "exactly best way" of doing things (Dulin and Quealy, 1971) and they expect to find this in reading, too. Over and over, you'll have to stress that they, not you alone, must continually evaluate and re-evaluate their own reading strategies. Though this sort of thinking will be foreign to many of them, it's crucial that it be emphasized if your goal for them of ultimate independence in reading is to be achieved.

9. Particularly if your course takes place "after hours," as most adult reading courses do, don't forget the fatigue factors operating (Smith and Dulin, 1971). Try to break your class-sessions into several short sections, rather than one or two long ones. Novelty and change are great moderators of fatigue, and they're particularly important when your students have put in a full, demanding day before coming to class. Personally, I always try, too, to have at least one "special" drill, game, exercise, or activity each session that's entirely different from anything we've done before and, if possible, fun as well as instructive. Context-clue guessing-games, tricky sentence-reading tests, and riddles, puzzles, and games demanding inferential-reading ability, are all good for this sort of thing.

10. Finally, don't forget theory. Professional-level people want to know why certain techniques work, as well as how; so always include a conceptual explanation of each new reading strategy you present, as well as an operational one. This gives the student a general pattern of attack he can

adapt from as needed, rather than simply use as long as you're directing him. With the professionally-oriented reader, perhaps more than any other type of reader discussed today, our goal must be the development of individual independence in reading; and only by giving him a good personal grasp of the theoretical bases of effective reading can this be done.

Summary

The purpose of this paper has been the description of a reading program appropriate for the professionally-oriented reader. A definition of this particular type of learner has been established; his particular goals and needs have been examined; the special types of reading materials he deals with daily have been outlined; and a set of methodological guidelines have been offered. The professionally-oriented reader uses reading both as a personal tool and as a professional tool, and both types of reading-need must clearly be provided for in the planning of his instructional program.

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